APPENDIX M

Subhas Chandra Bose 1897-1945

by Prof. Satadru Sen

This text is a lecture held 1999 by Prof. Satadru Sen (then at the University of Washington, Seattle, now at Purdue University, Indiana) to his students and very kindly made available for publication on the Andaman Associatrion's web-site, for which we are duly grateful.

Introductory note by George Weber:

Prof. Sen's lecture deals with what is undoubtedly the most controversial figures of recent Indian history and a major figutre in the history of the Andaman islands.

For someone brought up on the British version of events (as I was), to land at Calcutta airport and find it named after Subhas Chandra Bose is a bit of a shock - akin perhaps to landing at Berlin airport and finding it named after Adolf Hitler. More than half a century after his death, Bose still arouses an astonishing amount of hostility in Britain - and an equally fervent admiration among many honest people in India. His monument today stands on the waterfront at Port Blair:

Prof. Sen has managed the exceedingly difficult feat to make sense of the confusion surrounding Bose and to give as even-handed and dispassionate evaluation of the man as it is possible to give.

Subhas Chandra Bose

by Prof. Satadru Sen

In the period between the two world wars, Gandhi was the most powerful force within the Congress, and, it's probably fair to say, in nationalist politics. By this I mean not only that Gandhi was able to make the big decisions, or at least influence those decisions, but also that Gandhian methods had become the primary tactics of the nationalist movement. These tactics involved an emphasis on non-violence, and a vacillation between non-cooperation and active participation. In other wards, the Gandhi and the Congress would go for years quietly coexisting with British rule, then launch a non-cooperation campaign, gain some concessions from the British, and then go back to another period of relative quiet. For the most part, there were few challenges to this approach outside the Congress. The terrorists carried on in certain areas of the country, especially Bengal, but they were, at the most, a nuisance. By the time of WW II, it had long become evident that elite terrorism was not going to inspire a popular revolution. After Gandhi came along and demonstrated how a popular movement might be generated, the terrorists became even less relevant.

The challenge to the predominance of Gandhi and Gandhian tactics in Indian nationalism came from within the Congress. It came from a man named Subhas Chandra Bose, who, at the height of his political influence, was one of the two or three most powerful leaders in the Congress. Gandhi certainly saw Bose as a rival and a dangerous upstart, and did his best to destroy him politically. I want to focus on Bose today not because I think his battles with Gandhi are particularly fascinating, but because Bose held up an alternative vision, not only of political tactics, but also of political objectives.

Whereas Gandhi sought compromises with the British, Bose sought absolute victories. Gandhi was willing to wait a long time for independence, Bose wanted immediate action, if not immediate results. Gandhi was anti-materialistic and hostile to modern technology, Bose saw technology and mass production as essential to survival and dignity. Gandhi wanted a decentralized society and disliked the modern state; Bose wanted a strong central government and saw the modern state as the only solution to India's problems. And finally, Bose did not share Gandhi's dedication to non-violence.

Bose came from a upper-class Bengali family. His father was a well-known lawyer in Cuttack. He was the ninth child in a big, busy family; but his parents were aloof, and Bose grew up as a loner. He was a voracious reader, and he was especially attracted to the writings of the 19th~century Hindu social reformer, Swami Vivekananda. From Vivekananda he picked up a desire to take India, especially Hindu India, back to an idealized past in which Indians had been strong, moral and free. As he grew older, and became interested in socialism, he lost this interest in mythical golden ages and his overtly Hindu outlook. But he kept his determination to do something about what he saw as social injustice towards low-caste groups, the poor, and women.

He was a brilliant student, and became active in student politics at Calcutta's Presidency College. In those wartime years, the university offered military training to students who were interested (sort of like the ROTC today), and Bose eagerly signed up. But unlike Gandhi, who also had military experience, Bose did not join because he saw it as his duty to the Empire. He joined because he believed military training was an important part of a nationalist's education. He fervently believed that India, and especially Hindus, had become politically subjugated because of their military weakness. If the nation was to be free and worthy of respect, Bose felt, its citizens must know how to fight.

Also at Presidency College, he had one of his first direct encounters with the British. He became involved in an assault by students on a British professor, and was kicked out of school. This incident has since become one of the major myths of Indian nationalism, with Bose presented as the hero and Edward Oaten, the professor, presented as a racist villain. The truth is probably not so clear-cut. What is more likely is that Oaten was tactless, and Bose was hot-headed. A sense of humor was not one of Bose's strong points; he tended to be touchy and took everything very seriously.

He eventually graduated from Scottish Church college in Calcutta (after his father pulled a few strings to get him admitted), and was then packed off to England by his family to prepare for the ICS (Indian Civil Service) exams. He arrived in England in 1919, when he was 23 years old.

It's interesting to compare Bose's English experience with Gandhi's. Bose was probably a bit less

socially isolated than Gandhi had been when he had first arrived; there were more Indians around for him to spend time with. As with Gandhi, the time Bose spent in England made a deep impression on his thinking. Like Gandhi, Bose became something of a dandy in England, always wearing expensive, perfectly pressed clothes. Like Gandhi, Bose was terrified of sex, and put all his guards up when he was around English women. And like Gandhi, Bose became more conscious of his Indian identity when he was in England.

But there were some very significant differences, as well. Gandhi did not become a nationalist while he was in England. That came later. Gandhi's nationalism developed slowly over the decades, and if we had to look for pivotal movements we would have to find them in South Africa and later in Jallianwalla Bagh. Bose arrived in England as a budding nationalist, and as somebody who was very conscious, and very resentful, of the racial basis of British rule in India. In England, he wrote one of his friends: "Nothing makes me happier than to be served by the whites and to watch them clean my shoes. In England, Bose's nationalism became more clearly defined, and more militant, than it had been before.

A~ the same time, Bose liked England. He enjoyed the openness of English society, the freedom of expression, the debates in Parliament and at the university, the fact that students weren't shadowed by the police. It made him acutely aware of how different life was in colonial India. Also, there was a lot that Bose admired about the British in England. He found them efficient and energetic, he appreciated their sense of a national interest, and what he saw as their can-do attitude. These qualities - efficiency, energy, discipline, a sense of punctuality - are all central to modern industrial society, and they became central to Bose's vision of what India should be like.

He did very well in the ICS exams, and then faced a dilemma that had, by the 1920's, become common for Indian nationalists. Should he join the lAS, and participate in the administration of India, or should he keep his distance from the colonial government? Would participation constitute collaboration? Eventually Bose decided to stay away from the lAS.

Quite apart from his qualms about the Indian Civil Service, there was another major factor that influenced his decision. Bose was one of those people who desperately needed a father-figure in his life. Ever since he had been a child, he had attached himself to his teachers and to various swamis, hoping to find somebody who could be a combination of spiritual advisor, political mentor, and intellectual guide. For Bose, who was already leaning towards a career in nationalist politics, one possible choice might have been Gandhi, who served those functions for Nehru. But Bose never developed this intimacy with Gandhi. He admired Gandhi, but the philosophical differences were too great.

As he resigned from the Indian Civil Service, Bose finally found his father-figure. This was C.R. Das, who was another one of those nationalist lawyer-politicians active in the Congress. In some ways, Das was a curious choice of mentor for a hot-headed extremist like Bose. Das was the ultimate machine politician. He believed in building an administrative organization within the framework of the colonial government, and then running that organization as independently as possible. He did not look for

revolution; rather like Gandhi, he believed in a gradual process of piecemeal concessions. Like Gandhi, he had responded to the Rowlatt Acts by throwing himself into the non-cooperation movement. He had abandoned his legal practice and his western suits, and adopting khadi and frugality, although he was never quite as frugal as Gandhi.

Bose was drawn to C.R. Das primarily because he admired the latter's personal sacrifices. The fact that both men were Bengalis was also a factor. And perhaps, at a psychological level, Das - with his social, cultural and professional background - was sufficiently like Bose's own father.

So Bose wrote to C.R. Das, offering his services, and rather boldly outlining his own ideas of how to build a nationalist organization. Congress, he wrote, should have a permanent house. It should come up with a set of policies for all of India, including the princely states, It should have policies for improving the conditions of low-caste groups, It should have its own research and intelligence wing, and a well-organized public relations machine.

These ideas are important for several reasons, For one thing, they tell us a lot about how Bose was thinking about the present and the future. Already, in 1921, he wanted the Congress to function as a parallel government, This is something that very few people inside the Congress, including Gandhi, had given much thought to, or were comfortable contemplating, For another, these ideas highlight the emphasis Bose would place on efficient organization. They reflect his conviction that society's problems could be solved not through moral persuasion - which was the Gandhian line - but through pressure exerted by powerful organizations, such as a parallel government, or an independent nation-state.

Das was impressed by Bose's ideas, and invited Bose to work with him in Calcutta. So he went, and in 1921 he plunged immediately into hectic political activity mat fully utilized his talents as an organizer. Seeing a need to develop alternatives to the colonial educational system, Bose threw himself into creating a nationalist college. He set himself up as the principal, found professors who were willing to lecture, invented courses, developed course schedules, and even planned on taking some courses himself. All this was typical of the man: he wanted to be the leader, he wanted to plan and to organize, and at the same time he wanted to learn.

When he was not working on the nationalist college, Bose was organizing strikes and demonstrations in Calcutta as part of the non-cooperation movement. The British threw him in jail, along with C.R. Das and thousands of other activists, but this was pretty much what the non-cooperation movement aimed to achieve. He was released after six months, and was immediately back at work, doing what he did best: organizing large-scale operations. There had serious flooding in parts of Bengal. Bose, working with Congress volunteers, set up relief operations that were bigger and more effective than anything the Congress had done along those lines until then. Since the colonial government didn't do much to help the flood victims, Bose's reputation as an effective political leader grew larger.

At around this time, Bose began to have his first open disagreements with Gandhi. Actually, it was Das who had the disagreement with Gandhi, and initially Bose was involved only as Das' right-hand

man, Das wanted the Congress to contest elections to local councils under the Montagu-Chelmsford Act of 1919, and to become actively involved in local government. Gandhi felt this would undermine non-cooperation, and refused. But Das had support within the Congress on this issue, particularly from the two Nehrus. They got together and formed the Swaraj Party. This was not really a separate party, but a group that remained within the overall Congress organization. Faced with this tension within the Congress, Gandhi compromised and allowed the Swaraj Party to participate in the elections.

In the 1924 elections to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation - i.e., the city government of Calcutta - the Swaraj Party won a two-thirds majority. Bose became the Chief Executive Officer. In other words, at the age of 27, he was one of the most powerful men in the second-largest city of the British Empire. He loved the job: it allowed him to use his talent for developing and running big operations, to be innovative, and to be the boss. He took charge of all kinds of details, from designing city employees' uniforms, to creating new municipal programs for education and public health.

In the meantime, the colonial secret service kept a close watch on him, and tried to come up with evidence that would bring him down. The colonial government had first noticed Bose during Oaten episode, and now he was seen as a particularly dangerous nationalist politician, who was becoming too powerful too fast. Eventually, in the fall of 1924, Bose was arrested on vague charges of conspiring with terrorists to kill the police commissioner of Calcutta. The charges were almost certainly false. Bose probably sympathized with the terrorists, and may have helped them find jobs, etc., but it's totally implausible that he would have jeopardized his career at that stage by trying to kill his own police chief.

In any event, the British wanted to get him out of the country, and he was sent off to jail in Burma. His health broke down in prison, and he was eventually released in 1927. He came back to India and found that a lot had changed in his political fortunes. For one thing, C.R. Das had died, and the leadership of the Swaraj Party had been taken over by Gandhi loyalists. This left Bose without a secure foothold in the political establishment. He remained active in the Congress, but his moment at the center of power had passed. He went back to being the permanent outsider. In sonic ways, this freed him up, especially when it came to being able to criticize Gandhi. Now he had less to lose.

He spoke out strongly on two issues. Firstly, he criticized Gandhi's hostility to modern technology and mass He declared: "We have to live in the present and to adapt ourselves to modern conditions. The days of the bullock cart are gone forever." And, for those of you who have been following the recent controversy over the Indian nuclear program, he added: "Free India must arm herself for any eventuality as long as the whole world does not accept wholeheartedly the policy of disarmament."

His second point of disagreement with Gandhi was over the pace and the objectives of the nationalist movement. Gandhi tended to give the British a lot of time to respond to Congress demands, and there were long gaps between the periods of active agitation. Bose wanted immediate agitation, and could not understand why Gandhi always waited for the right moment. A true revolutionary, he felt, created the moment, rather than wait for it to arrive.

Also, Gandhi and his allies within the Congress were not, in 1928, ready to come out and demand complete independence. They preferred to define the nationalist goal as dominion status, i.e., as autonomy within the British Empire. Bose found this unacceptable, and he did not hesitate to say so.

Nevertheless, he was still working closely with the Congress. During the Congress' convention in Calcutta in 1928, Bose organized the ceremonies. In the process, he allowed his imagination to run wild: he put Congress volunteers in military-style uniforms, named himself General Officer Commanding, and held a military-style honor guard for Nehru senior. Once again, this was his childish delight in uniforms and smart salutes coming to the forefront. Most people didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. Gandhi, most likely, was not amused.

In 1929, Bose was elected president of the Bengal branch of the Congress, defeating Gandhi's candidate. Not long after that, he was jailed for protesting the government's treatment of revolutionaries and political prisoners. In 1930 Gandhi finally gave the call for complete independence, and launched a new campaign of civil disobedience. Bose watched the campaign from prison. While in prison, he was elected mayor of Calcutta. W1~en he was released in the fall of 1930, he immediately went back to being the organizer of massive nationalist demonstrations. After a confrontation with the police in which he was violently assaulted, he was sent back to jail. For the time being, his career as an active politician in India came to an end.

Bose's health failed again in prison, and he went to Europe to recover. He spent most of the 1930's in Europe, shadowed by the British secret service. Nevertheless, he traveled extensively in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Italy, Ireland and eastern Europe. He developed extensive contacts with the European left as well as with the right, both of which had reasons to be anti-Britain, and to welcome Bose as a man who was fighting the British in India. He met Mussolini, discussed his revolutionary plans with him, and Mussolini was suitably impressed.

This period in Europe had a profound effect on Bose's politics. For one thing, his exposure to the left sharpened his faith in revolutionary socialism, and his determination to lead a socialist revolution in India. For another, his exposure to the right gave him an admiration for the techniques of organization and administration that the Nazis were trying out in Germany, and that Mussolini's fascists had been trying out in Italy.

We now have to deal with the question of Bose's political ideology at this point, especially the question of whether or not he was a fascist. Well, in a word: yes, Bose was now a fascist. He had no problems with openly admiring fascism. At the same time, he was not a Nazi, in the sense that he was not a racist, and he had no interest in theories of national purity and cultural supremacy. Bose did not seek a Hindu India, or

some pure version of Indian culture. He had long outgrown his old politics of Hindu nostalgia. He welcomed Muslim participation in Indian nationalism, and he did not hesitate when it came to forming alliances with Muslim politicians.

For Bose, fascism was a technique of political organization, and a diagram for relations between government and society. Bose was not a democrat. He may have been one in the 1920's, but by the late 1930's he was quite certain that parliamentary democracy was not suitable for India. In his mind, India needed firm control by a single party, which would direct every aspect of social, political, economic and even personal life.

He believed that India's problems - such as caste discrimination, class injustice, the need for economic modernization, etc. - were so deep-rooted that mey could only be weeded out through massive state intervention. For this, Bose believed, the machinery of the state had to be in the hands of a single, powerful, reforming party organization, such as the Nazi Party in Germany or the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. At this point, he still believed that this party would be the Congress.

Bose finally returned to India in January of 1937. He was now much more radical than he had been when he had left. He was quick to reject the Government of India Act of 1935, which had allowed for greater Indian participation in the provincial governments. For Bose, the law was too little too late. He was unhappy that the Congress had agreed to participate in the government under the Act, but this did not keep him away from Congress politics. The years in Europe had not diminished his popularity in India, and he had no trouble getting elected as the president of the Congress. He remained president for only a year, before Gandhi schemed to bring him down.

But for that one year, Bose was king, and he enjoyed himself thoroughly. As in the past, he threw himself into building Congress up as a practical parallel government. In keeping with his faith in modern technology, he set up a committee of prominent scientists to develop a viable industrial policy. He raised funds, and he campaigned tirelessly all over India. He emphasized his socialist ideals, and along with Nehru, became the recognized leader of the Congress left.

But Bose and Nehru did not become political allies. There are several reasons. There were the philosophical differences: Nehru was a democrat, Bose was authoritarian. Also Nehru, at heart, was something of an Anglophile, in the sense that he had a soft spot for India's connection with England. Bose had no such sentimental attachment. Then there were differences in temperament that played out in the way they each approached socialism and policy-making. Nehru was a visionary without much interest in the details of implementing his visions. But details mattered to Bose. And finally, there was the Gandhi factor.

In spite of his philosophical differences with Gandhi, Nehru was Gandhi's protege, and everybody knew it. Nehru would disagree with Gandhi on specific issues, but when push came to shove and a decision had to be made, he would give in and let Gandhi have his way. This was partly Out of a genuine respect for Gandhi's leadership, and partly because Nehru understood very well that his own political fortunes were linked to Gandhi's. As long as Nehru was Gandhi's boy, his own future within the Congress organization was insured. This reluctance to go up against Gandhi meant that when Gandhi turned on Bose, Nehru made no real effort to defend his fellow-socialist.

When Bose had been elected Congress president, Gandhi had accepted it. The break came in the fall of

1938, when war in Europe became a distinct possibility. Bose and the left saw the possibility of war as a tremendous political opportunity, and wanted to use this opportunity to pressure the colonial government for immediate concessions. Gandhi and the Congress right, on the other hand, wanted to issue a much weaker resolution, hoping that the British would simply do the right thing if war broke out. Bose and the left refused to give in, and Gandhi was furious. Even though Bose was the Congress president at this time, Gandhi had long enjoyed the status of the unofficial super-president of the Congress, and he did not like Bose's disobedience.

Bose was up for re-election in January of 1939, and Gandhi decided to block him. Quite apart from his personal animosity, there were real issues involved. Bose wanted the Congress to walk away from implementing the Government of India Act of 1935. He also wanted to give the colonial government an ultimatum demanding immediate independence, and to begin all-out civil disobedience if the government refused. Gandhi and the Congress right felt otherwise. In any event, Bose won his re-election, narrowly defeating P. Sitaramayya, who was Gandhi's chosen candidate.

Gandhi now worked actively to bring Bose down. The Congress constitution provided only two ways for getting rid of the president: he could be voted Out of office, or he could resign. Since Gandhi was unwilling to wait for the next election, he decided to force Bose to resign. Even though Bose was the Congress president, Gandhi's supporters controlled the party's Working Committee. Without their cooperation, the president could not operate effectively; it was a system of checks and balances similar to what we have in the US government.

Gandhi's supporters now resigned, and Bose found himself unable to form a new Working Committee against Gandhi's opposition. He tried hard to work out a compromise with Gandhi. He even offered to let Gandhi nominate the entire Working Committee, if Gandhi would only accept Bose's plan to launch an agitation for immediate independence. Gandhi politely refused, and Bose had no option except to resign, four months into his second term as president.

One of the interesting things about this whole episode is that Bose blamed Nehru more than he blamed Gandhi. He never completely cut his ties with Gandhi, and continued to try to rebuild his bridges. But he never forgave Nehru for not helping him during this crisis.

On September 3 of 1939, war finally broke out in Europe. And not just in Europe, because the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow declared war on India's behalf, without consulting a single Indian. This was a major embarrassment for the Congress, which was now faced with two choices. It could either get some significant concessions from the colonial government. Or it could resign from the ministries it controlled under the Government of India Act. So the Congress went to the government, and asked for a clear statement of its military objectives.

The government stonewalled, saying that it was too early in the war to talk about military objectives. It also refused to talk about Indian independence, saying that any such discussion would have to wait until after the war. Since there was no clearly defined military objective, it meant that the government would decide when the war was over, and when Indian independence could be discussed. Congress

now resigned from its ministries. It's been suggested that the British deliberately maneuvered Congress into resigning, to have a free hand in running the government during the war. Whatever the case may be, the Congress now found itself out of office, and with nothing but moral outrage to show for it. Still Gandhi refused to launch an agitation.

Bose, meanwhile, had been busy organizing his own party, called the Forward Bloc. This was initially within the structure of the Congress. But by 1940 it had become an independent political party, mainly because the Congress had refused to tolerate its allegiance to Bose instead of to Gandhi, and had kicked its officers out of office. Things were happening very fast for Bose, as usual. In July of 1940, he was arrested and sent to prison again for planning to lead a march demanding the removal of a memorial to the victims of the Black Hole of Calcutta. He went on a hunger-strike, and in December he was released.

Then began his great adventure. Even before his last arrest, Bose had begun to think about getting himself Out of India. He felt that there was little that he could achieve in India under the circumstances. His career in the Congress had stalled, and besides, the Congress was unwilling to do what he wanted it to do. The war, he felt, was too important an opportunity to waste. So he came up with a plan. He would escape from India, get to the Soviet Union, and then go on to Germany. When he got to Germany, he would persuade the Germans to help him in his fight against the British in India.

Bose now contacted a communist organization in Punjab. He asked if they might be able to smuggle him across the border into Afghanistan, and through Afghanistan into the USSR. They told him it was possible. In the winter of 1940-41 his journey began. Disguised as a Muslim life-insurance agent, Bose escaped from his family home in Calcutta in the middle of the night. He boarded a train at a remote rural station, and travelled to Peshawar on the border between Punjab and Afghanistan. From there, in a new disguise as a deaf-mute Pathan, and accompanied by his communist contact, he trekked across the desert to Kabul. His plan to travel across the border directly into the Soviet Union had been discarded as impractical. His current plan was to contact the Soviet embassy in Kabul.

Kabul in the 1940's was basically a truck-stop village with embassies. Bose, still posing as a deaf-mute, stayed at truck-drivers' hotel for weeks, trying to contact the Russians. He had no luck, the Russians suspected that he was a British agent trying to infiltrate the Soviet Union. Next Bose contacted the Germans. They heard him out, and were intrigued by his ideas, but dragged their feet. Eventually it was the Italians who rescued him. The Italian diplomat in Kabul was fascinated by Bose's plans. He gave Bose an Italian passport and the name Orlando Mazzotta, and persuaded the Germans and the Soviets to help him. Finally, in March of 1941, Bose travelled to the Soviet border in a diplomatic car, took a train to Moscow, and then flew to Berlin.

Bose remained in Germany for the next two years. He offered the Germans a deal. If they helped him, he said, he could trigger a revolution in India. Having to deal with a revolutionary situation in India would distract British forces from the war against Germany. In the process, Britain would lose the war with Germany, and lose India simultaneously. This was the big picture. To bring all this about, Bose

put forward several ideas. Some of these he accomplished; in others areas he was frustrated. Let's look at his political objectives first.

Bose wanted facilities for broadcasting radio messages into India. This the Germans readily provided, and he made regular speeches directed at the Indian public. In his broadcasts, Bose urged people to use the war as an opportunity to break free. Germany would win the war, and the British should not be allowed to hang on in India. The first broadcasts created a sensation in India, largely because Bose's disappearance had generated a lot of public interest. But it didn't go much further than that. This was because in spite of Bose's presence in Berlin, to most Indians the war with Germany was still far away, and people couldn't really visualize the German army sweeping through the Caucasus to liberate India. Also, by this time, Gandhi and the Congress had finally launched the Quit India movement, and a violent revolutionary situation already existed in India.

Bose's other major accomplishment in Germany was organizing the Indian Legion. In the course of the fighting in north Africa, the Germans had taken thousands of Indian POWs. Bose went to the POW camps, and asked the Indian soldiers to join him to fight against the British. This idea was not entirely new. An expatriate Indian named Mohammed lqbal Shedai had already made a start organizing Indian POWs captured by the Italians. For a while, Bose and Shedai ran parallel efforts with the POWs. Then the Indian soldiers in Shedai's camp mutinied, This discredited Shedai, and left Bose as the only Indian organizing an army to fight on the side of the Axis.

Ultimately, the Indian Legion that Bose organized in Germany numbered about 3000 soldiers. It was not easy putting this force together. Initially, when Bose visited the POW camps to talk to the soldiers, he got a hostile reception. The British Indian Army may have been an army without a nationalist ideology, but it would be a mistake to think of it as a purely mercenary force. The colonial army had its own ideology, which was a combination of loyalty to the British throne, loyalty to the commanding officer, loyalty to the regiment, and a tradition of service in which the same family or same village sent many generations of soldiers into the Army.

But Bose persisted. He had the men separated from their officers, and talked to them one on one. Eventually, he got through. He promised them proper treatment from the Germans, appropriate rank, pay and benefits, and he promised them victory. The British, he told them, were certain to lose the war; they were like a dead snake that people continue to fear. If only they shook off this fear, Bose said, victory and freedom would be theirs.

Bose had planned that when the German swing through the southern USSR and the Middle East reached India, the Indian Legion would spearhead the attack on India. He anticipated that this would have two results. One was that when the soldiers of the colonial Indian Army faced the Indian Legion, they would refuse to continue to fight for the British and desert en masse to Bose's side. The other was that an invasion of India by Indian Legion would galvanize the Indian population into rising up against the British, and make Bose's task easier.

As things turned out, however, the Indian Legion came to a rather sad end. First, the Russians stopped

the German advance at the battle of Stalingrad. This, combined with the defeat at El Alamein, meant that the Germans would be unlikely to get anywhere near India. Second, after Bose left Germany in 1943, the Legion was left without an effective leader to look Out for them. They were absorbed into the German army and deployed in France. Now they knew they weren't going to be fighting for India's freedom, and their morale and discipline disintegrated. Many deserted, some joined the French resistance, and the rest disappeared in the chaos of the German retreat.

Bose's biggest frustration in Germany had to do with diplomatic recognition. He wanted Germany to officially recognize India as independent, and him as the leader of a government in exile. This the Germans refused to give him. The reasons lay partly in apathy, partly in the Master Race mentality, and partly in the peculiarities of Hitler's vision of the post-war world.

Hitler was not entirely comfortable with the idea of helping Indians - whom he saw as racially inferior - to defeat the British. The British were Aryans, after all. In his own way, Hitler admired the English, and through much of the war he continued to hope that he could come to some kind of an understanding with Britain: essentially, that Germany would get a free hand in Europe, and England would get to keep most of its empire. He was perfectly willing to use Bose to make trouble for the British, but he had no long-term interest in India's future, one way or another. Bose knew this, of course. He wanted to use the Germans for his own purposes. But eventually, as things turned out, neither was able to do very much for the other side.

,But by the middle of 1942, Bose was already looking beyond Germany, to Japan. The string of Japanese victories after Pearl Harbor had achieved two things. One was that Singapore, which was a major British military stronghold, had fallen to the Japanese. This placed tens of thousands of Indian soldiers in Japanese hands. What Bose had tried to do with the Indian Legion in Germany, he could try in Southeast Asia on a much larger scale. The other thing that encouraged Bose was the fact that Japanese forces had come all the way to the Indian border with Burma. In other words, if he could organize an army in Japanese-occupied territory, and attack on India would be a relatively practical idea.

So, in February of 1943, the Germans did Bose one last favor: they helped him get to Japan. He travelled in a German submarine to the coast of Mozambique, where he transferred to a Japanese submarine. This submarine took him to southeast Asia.

The former British colonies of southeast Asia - Burma, Malaya, and Singapore - had large Indian populations, and Bose was welcomed as a conquering hero. In a sense, they had been waiting for him; in spite of all efforts to keep his plans secret, rumors had been circulating that he would come. The Japanese welcomed him also, and were far more enthusiastic about working with him than the Germans had been.

I'll give you an example of the difference in attitude: when Bose was on the German sub, he ate bread that tasted like it had been dipped in diesel. On the Japanese sub, the crew had brought along Indian spices especially for him, and cooked him Indian curries until he protested about the frequent meals.

After he reached Asia, Bose travelled widely in the Japanese-help territories: to Burma, Malaya, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, occupied China, and of course Japan. Unlike his uneasy relationship with Hitler, he quickly developed an excellent relationship with Tojo.

The Japanese gave Bose two things which he had wanted very badly: diplomatic recognition as the premier of free India, and a real army. Let's talk about his political status first. He didn't have a territory, but he had a people: the Indian population of southeast Asia was placed under his jurisdiction. Bose got all the privileges and trappings of a head of state: the motorcade, the official aircraft, the honor guards, the works, He enjoyed it. In part, this was sheer megalomania: his old love of playing the great leader was resurfacing with a vengeance. In part, however, Bose recognized that it was necessary for him to play this role if was to deal effectively with the Japanese. He did not have any illusions about how the Japanese treated subject peoples. He knew that if he, and the Indians of southeast Asia, were to be taken seriously as allies, he had to insist upon his own status as an important political leader.

Bose did in fact run a real government in southeast Asia. I'm referring not to his status as leader of the government-in-exile of India, but to his status as leader of the local Indians. The regime Bose put together in Singapore, with the help of people who came forward to work with him, had the power to make and enforce laws, to collect taxes, and to recruit soldiers for the army. This people who paid the taxes and obeyed the laws did so willingly at first. Towards the end of the war, this cooperation became strained. As the Japanese collapsed and Tokyo's funding for Bose's army dried up, Bose pressed the local Indians for higher war taxes, and punished people who tried to hold back. This cost him some of his local popularity.

The army, to some extent, already existed when Bose arrived in Asia. After the fall of Singapore, an Indian officer named Mohan Singh had created the Indian National Army, or the INA as it came to be known, from Indian POWs. This force was much larger than the Indian Legion in Germany. As such, it was a viable military and political resource. Mohan Singh himself had rather an unhappy career with the INA. Soldiers had joined the INA on the understanding that they would fight only on the Indian front. When the Japanese tried to send the INA to fight in other parts of southeast Asia, several units mutinied. These units were disbanded, and Mohan Singh ended up in a Japanese prison.

This was, in a way, a parallel of what had happened in Europe with Shedai's army. When Bose came to Asia, he quickly assumed command of what was left of Mohan Singh's old INA. At this time, this force had only 13,000 soldiers. But Bose had big plans. He wanted to expand the INA in two phases, first to 50,000 soldiers, and then to a force of 3 million. The men would come from the colonial Indian Army as well as from the southeast Asian Indian community.

The Japanese were shocked at such an ambitious plan, and told Bose that they would be able to arm a much smaller force, of about 30,000. Eventually, the INA reached a peak strength of around 50,000. It was an interesting social experiment in more ways than one. The colonial Indian Army had organized its units around ethnicity and religion, so that the British could play off one group of Indians against another if necessary. In contrast, the INA had fully integrated units. It also had a regiment of female

troops: this was the Rani of Jhansi Brigade, named after the queen who had died fighting the British in the Rebellion of 1857.

For Bose, the big numbers were necessary for their political effect. It didn't matter if most of the 3 million weren't equipped with adequate weapons. He saw the INA as a psychological force as well as a military asset. He knew that if people in India became aware that a nationalist army of 3 million was waiting just across the border, ready to invade, it would have a tremendous effect on the way Indians related to the British. It would inspire pride and confidence, it would take away the fear of British power, and it would make it impossible for the British to maintain control.

In fact, Bose's whole strategy for using the INA depended upon this psychological factor. He wanted the force to spearhead a Japanese invasion, expecting that this would totally demoralize and dissolve the colonial Indian army, ,,,drawing its soldiers into the INA. He expected also that the general public would respond with overwhelming support.

It turned out that he was half right. The INA lost the war, but won the peace. In the summer of 1944, the Japanese were finally ready to begin their invasion of India. They attacked from Burma in a two-pronged approach, hoping to capture the town of Imphal. This would then become the base for the rest of the invasion. But, at this critical point in Bose's plan, everything that could go wrong went wrong, The monsoon came early, and the Japanese assault became bogged down in the rain and the mud.

Also, by this point, the war in the Pacific was going very badly for the Japanese. Therefore the Japanese had allocated most of their air power to the Pacific theater, leaving their forces in the Burma-India theater without any air cover. This gave the British a crucial advantage.

Then there were other factors. Food rations became exhausted. Allied air strikes cut the supply lines. Japanese and INA units found themselves eating grass and jungle flowers to stay alive. Japanese commanders on the ground made some serious tactical errors. Normally, when things are going well, a few mistakes don't have to be fatal. But by 1944 the Japanese had overreached their capabilities. The attack on Imphal failed, and the counterattack was devastatingly effective.

The INA became caught up in this disaster, and never recovered. The INA's coordination with Japanese units was poor to begin with. Once things began to go badly for the Japanese, INA units became stranded. Some units fought well and there were plenty of individual heroics to go around, but it made no difference to the overall failure.

The biggest failure was the INA's inability to break up the morale of the colonial Indian Army, which did most of the fighting at Imphal, and which played a major role in the Allied counterattack. Bose had expected that when the INA met the British Indian Army, colonial troops would immediately desert to the nationalist side. This did not happen. Bose had seriously underestimated the ideological strength of the colonial military. In fact, what often happened was the reverse. Starving and out of ammunition in the jungle, shocked by the failure of the Japanese offensive, many INA troops were eager to return to their old units and their old comrades in the colonial army. There were over 700

desertions, and eventually Bose had to give orders that deserters would be shot on suspicion.

After the Imphal defeat, the Japanese retreated steadily through Burma and into Malaya, pursued by British and colonial Indian troops. The INA retreated with them. This retreat, ironically, brought Out Bose's best qualities as a leader. On the long trek from Burma to Bankok, followed closely by British tanks and under frequent attack from the air, he marched for days on end, refusing the offer of a car while his men had to walk. Throughout the march, he made sure that INA troops had proper food and medical care. In the chaos of the retreat, Bose was their best protection, and everybody knew it. Without him, the Japanese would have been only too eager to abandon the INA.

Bose returned to Singapore and tried for a while to rebuild the INA. This was the period when he demanded ten percent of the value of peoples assets to pay for military expenses, and made himself unpopular with the wealthier Indians in Malaya. But for Japan, the war was almost over. After the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was nothing left for Bose in working with Tokyo.

He now made a political gamble. The Soviets had been an ally of the British during the war, and an enemy of his allies, the Germans and the Japanese. But Bose correctly foresaw that the Soviet alliance with the west would not last. He decided to travel to Manchuria, which had just been overrun by the USSR. He planned to continue his fight against the British, but from Russia this time.

On 16th August, a day after the Japanese surrendered, Bose boarded a Japanese bomber in Saigon, on his way to Darien, in China. On the 18th of August, after a refueling stop in Taipei, the bomber crashed. Bose was still alive, but badly burned. He died in a Japanese military hospital in Taipei, soon afterwards.

The story didn't end there, During the war, the British had carefully suppressed all news about the INA. This news now finally broke in India. Bose immediately became a hero of mythical proportions. People refused to believe he was dead; in fact, people refused to believe it for decades.

Also, Bose's predictions about the psychological value of his army were finally vindicated. The British played into his hands by making a series of miscalculations about how to deal with 25,000 captured INA soldiers. Misreading the public mood, the British decided to stage a series of highly publicized trials of INA officers in New Delhi. Incredibly, they believed that since the INA had taken up arms against Indians in the colonial army, the Indian public would want them to be severely punished.

Exactly the opposite happened. When three INA officers - Shah Nawaz Khan, G.S. Dhillon and Prem Kumar Sahgal -were put on trial for treason and murder in the Red Fort, the public quickly grasped the symbolism of the affair. The three officers included a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh. In other words, all three of India's major religious communities were seen as being on trial for having come together to fight for their country. The fact that the trials were being held at the Red Fort, where the last independent Indian regime had been based, was seen as an added insult.

Even before the trials began, celebrations honoring the INA were held all over India. When the trials

did begin, anti-British crowds besieged the Red Fort, and more than a hundred people were killed or injured by police firing. In Calcutta, Hindus and Muslims, flying the flags of the Congress as well as the Muslim League, attacked British and American military bases. Scores of military vehicles were damaged or destroyed. Over 200 military personnel were injured, and 32 Indians were killed. The violence soon spread across much of northern India, all the way to Bombay and Karachi.

Congress leaders like Gandhi and Nehru, who had been uncomfortable with Bose while he was alive, now eagerly jumped on the INA bandwagon. Nehru put on his old lawyer's robes and participated in the defense of the officers on trial. Gandhi made speeches praising Bose.

Confronted by this public hostility, the British found themselves unable to punish the INA prisoners as severely as they would have liked. Most got commuted sentences, or short prison terms. Nevertheless, the British persisted with the trials, and the violence continued to grow. Early in 1946, martial law had to be declared in Calcutta.

At around the same time, Indian troops in the colonial navy and air force mutinied, citing sympathy for the INA as well as unhappiness about their conditions of service. Within days, 78 warships had pulled down the Union Jack. Fierce battles erupted in the streets of Karachi and Bombay, in which tanks and machine-guns were used. In Bombay, the mutineers were supported by the working class. 600,000 textile workers went on strike, and joined the sailors in street battles against British forces.

The rebels eventually failed, in part because they didn't have the firepower that the British were able to call in, and in part because the Congress panicked and told them to stop fighting. The mutineers had looked to the Congress and the Muslim League to lead them. By the spring of 1946, however, the Congress and the League were too deeply implicated in the government of the country to see any good in this kind of unrest. Leaders like Nehru and Jinnah knew that independence was now at the most only a couple of years away. As such, they did not want to encourage something as messy, as volatile and as dangerous as an armed rebellion. They had no experience and no stomach for leading this kind of movement, and they quietly supported the British efforts to crush the rebels.

But Bose's predictions about what would happen when the INA entered India had, to a considerable degree, come true, He had predicted a public uprising and sympathy from colonial troops, and now he was proved right. This is what I meant when I said that the INA lost the war but won the peace. But if Bose was right, where did he go wrong?

Well, as I've argued, that Bose misread the nature of the colonial army. On the battlefield, when everything was at stake, the colonial army retained its loyalties. It was only after the war that sections of it mutinied.

It can also be argued that Bose misread the political situation in India in the 1940's. Being away in Germany and southeast Asia had isolated him from the political realities of wartime India, and he had missed some crucial changes in the way the wind was blowing. By 1942, the British were willing to discuss independence for India when the war ended. By 1945, there was no doubt that negotiations

would soon begin. Yet Bose continued to fight a military battle, instead of rejoining the political process.

Was this unnecessary, and a mistake? Not if you were in Bose's shoes. He had taken up arms against the British, and his relations with the Congress had collapsed. He had reason to believe that if he returned to India while it was controlled by the British or the Congress, he would be treated as a war criminal.

Also, although India was clearly on its way to independence by the mid-40's, this was not the kind of independence that Bose had wanted. For Bose, the revolution at home was as important as throwing out the British, and for this he needed to be completely in charge. He did not believe that the replacement of British rule by a conservative parliamentary democracy would not bring about fundamental changes in the structure of Indian society.

This brings us some of the most basic questions about Bose, the nationalist and the politician. What are we to make of the fact that he wanted to invite the Germans and the Japanese to invade India? And how do we reconcile his heroic status with the fact that he aligned himself with Nazi Germany, and that he openly advocated dictatorship as the best form of government for India?

Perhaps the biggest weakness in Bose's plan was his belief that even after bringing the Japanese into India, he could maintain effective control of the country. At a diplomatic level, he had grounds for believing he could pull this off. He refused to take India into the Japanese Co-Prosperity Sphere, which was the euphemism the Japanese used for their new empire in Asia, The Japanese accepted Bose's decision on this. Still, if the invasion of India had succeeded, it is difficult to see how he could have remained fully independent of Japanese control.

Bose felt that since the people of India would be with him, he would be able to resist Japanese demands. He knew that India was a long way from Japan, and that the Japanese were already at the limits of their capabilities. He also pointed out that the American revolutionaries had accepted assistance from France, and this didn't make the US a French colony. He may have had a point. But this analogy has its limits. Given the fact the INA was completely dependent on Japan for arms and ammunition, and that it would take time to develop an industrial infrastructure in India, Japan would probably have had a lot of leverage.

There is no getting away from the fact that Bose deliberately ignored the moral evil that Nazi Germany represented. He had lived in Germany for much of the 1930s and the early 40s. He must have known something of what was going on. He had the courage to speak out against some of the racist aspects of the Nazi ideology, and even speak his mind to Hitler himself. But he was not sufficiently disturbed by Nazism to reject Hitler's help. Similarly, his alliance with Japan ignored the atrocities that the Japanese had perpetrated against people in the countries they had occupied.

Unlike Gandhi and Nehru, Bose believed that the end justified the means. He wanted freedom for India, and to some extent, he didn't care who he had to approach for assistance. But this explanation, I

think, is too kind to Bose. At some basic level, Bose had an ideological affinity for fascism, and he was a little too comfortable with using the state to crush dissent and ideological diversity.

Indians who refused to believe that Bose was dead, and who continued to believe for decades that he was alive somewhere in the Soviet Union, hoped he would just surface again some day like a messiah, and solve all of India's problems. Yet these people misunderstand Bose, and what he stood for. Had the INA and Bose succeeded on the battlefield, a free India would have been a totalitarian society.

Bose was passionate in his patriotism, and genuinely well-intentioned. He was genuine in his desire to help the disadvantaged segments of Indian society. But good intentions are not enough. Some of the greatest tyrants of the 20th century had good intentions: Lenin, Mao, Pol Pot. (You'll notice that these are all tyrants of the left. Tyrants of the right like Hitler, Franco, or the Shah of Iran, don't get credit for good intentions.)

Bose didn't seem to realize that the methods you choose do matter in the final analysis. Totalitarian institutions inevitably corrupt even the best-intentioned people. Even if it hadn't corrupted Bose himself, even if he had remained a so-called benevolent dictator, there would have been no guarantees that his successor would have been benevolent. Ultimately, dying at the end of the war was the best thing Bose could have done for India.

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